

A LifeCare® Digest on Emergency Preparedness

Unexpected disasters can strike at any time. While we hope you are never the victim of a disaster, this digest is intended to help you learn how to protect yourself and your family by planning ahead. Many of the tips in this digest have been adapted from the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Discuss these ideas with your family and prepare an emergency plan. Knowing what to do in an emergency and being prepared is your best defense against disaster.

Be Prepared

Take responsibility for your family's safety by learning about potential disasters that could occur in your area and the emergency notification systems in place to warn you. Begin by calling your local Emergency Management Office or Red Cross chapter and asking the following questions:

- ♦ Which disasters could occur in my area?
- ♦ How should I prepare for each disaster?
- ♦ How will I be warned of an emergency?
- ♦ What are my community's evacuation routes?
- ♦ Is special assistance available for children, elderly or disabled persons (if applicable)?

In addition...

- ♦ Ask your workplace about emergency plans.
- ♦ Learn about emergency plans for your child's school or day care center.
- ♦ Learn about emergency plans for your adult loved one's day care center, senior center, residential care facility, etc.

The American Red Cross provides relief to victims of disasters and helps people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Contact your local chapter for more information on potential disasters in your area and how to prepare for them.

"My family lives in Littleton, Illinois, and we get a lot of severe weather. I often worry about what we would do in the event of a true disaster," explains Jennifer. "What preparations can my husband and I make to protect our two young children and my elderly mother?"

Next, find out how you may be notified of an impending disaster. Although disasters often happen unexpectedly, in most areas, the following systems are in place to warn you of an emergency:

- ♦ **Commercial radio and television stations**—Many local and national radio and television networks broadcast emergency information, but you should call your local Red Cross chapter to find out what your designated Emergency Alert System (EAS) stations are for both radio and television.
- ♦ **National Weather Service**—The National Weather Service provides information about severe weather, such as thunderstorms, winter storms, hurricanes, floods and tornadoes. Listen to the radio or watch television for these terms:

Watch: Severe weather is threatening and may occur in your area. Continue to listen or watch for more information.

Warning: Severe weather is happening now, is imminent or has been seen on weather radar. Protect yourself immediately.

- ♦ **NOAA weather radio**—These special radios provide the earliest notification with an alarm to alert you of anticipated bad weather. NOAA radio receivers can be purchased at most retail outlets that sell electronic merchandise.

- ♦ **Door-to-door warning from local emergency officials**—If officials come to your door to warn you of potential emergencies, listen carefully and follow their instructions.

Note—Since emergencies can happen quickly, watches and warnings may not be issued or you may miss them. Always pay attention to the weather and take action if you suspect severe weather is moving into your area, even if you have not heard an official warning.

Disaster Precautions

This section details precautionary steps you can take to safeguard your family in the event of an emergency. By establishing some basic emergency plans and educating your family about what to do in a disaster situation, you can help protect your loved ones from harm.

Create an Emergency Plan

It's important to have an emergency plan in the event of a disaster. Meet with family members to discuss how to respond to potential disasters, but try not to scare or alarm them. Reassure your loved ones that, while disasters rarely occur, it is always best to be prepared. Talk to your children and/or adult loved ones about the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes and other emergencies. Make sure they know how to recognize danger signals, including what smoke detectors, fire alarms and local community warning systems (e.g., horns, sirens) sound like. In addition:

- ♦ Post emergency numbers near all telephones.
- ♦ Teach children how and when to call 911, police and fire departments.
- ♦ Draw a floor plan of your home indicating escape routes. (For more information, see the section "Escape Plans" later in this digest.)
- ♦ Learn how to turn off the main switches for water, gas and electricity in your home in case you need to evacuate.
- ♦ Discuss what to do about power outages and personal injuries.
- ♦ Instruct household members to turn on the radio for emergency information.
- ♦ Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or

relative to call if your family is separated by disaster (it is often easier to call out-of-state than within the affected area).

- ♦ Teach children how to make long-distance telephone calls.
- ♦ Pick two places to meet in the event of a disaster: a place near your home, and a place outside your neighborhood, in case you cannot return home.
- ♦ Take basic first aid and CPR classes.
- ♦ Keep important family papers in a water- and fireproof container.
- ♦ Make arrangements to take your pet to a friend's or relative's home in the event of an emergency.

Prepare a Disaster Supplies Kit

Having a disaster supplies kit can be a lifesaver in an emergency, particularly if you are forced to evacuate your home. By assembling some essential supplies, you can protect yourself and your loved ones, and avoid waiting in lines for food, water, medicine or other critical supplies. Assemble enough supplies to last for at least three days. Store them in an easy-to-carry container, such as a backpack or duffel bag, with an ID tag. Be sure to include:

- ♦ A supply of water (one gallon per person per day). Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- ♦ A supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener
- ♦ A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes
- ♦ Blankets or sleeping bags
- ♦ A first aid kit
- ♦ Prescription medications, including instructions, dosages and any allergies. Replace medicines regularly, as some have expiration dates
- ♦ A battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries
- ♦ Credit cards and cash
- ♦ An extra set of car keys
- ♦ Insurance cards and insurance agent's name and telephone number

- ◆ Special items for infants, if applicable (e.g., diapers, blankets, baby food, etc.)
- ◆ Special items for the elderly, if applicable (e.g., an extra set of glasses, medications, assistive devices, etc.)
- ◆ Special items for disabled family members, if applicable (e.g., assistive devices, special equipment, etc.)
- ◆ Special items for pets, if applicable (e.g., food and water, collar, leash, sturdy carrier, identification, license, proof of vaccination, etc.)
- ◆ Emergency contact information. (For your convenience, we have included an Emergency Contact Information form for you to fill out at the end of this digest.)

Home Safety

In addition to creating an emergency plan and preparing a disaster supplies kit, there are specific precautionary measures you can take in your home to protect yourself during an unexpected emergency.

Identify Home Hazards

In a disaster, ordinary household items can cause injury or damage. Anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a potential hazard. Reduce the potential for disaster by using the following suggestions:

- ◆ Have defective electrical wiring and leaky gas connections repaired by a professional.
- ◆ Fasten shelves securely.
- ◆ Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves.
- ◆ Hang pictures and mirrors away from beds.
- ◆ Brace overhead light fixtures.
- ◆ Secure the water heater by strapping it to wall studs, if necessary.
- ◆ Repair cracks in ceilings or foundations.
- ◆ Store weed killers, pesticides and flammable products away from heat sources.
- ◆ Place items such as oily polishing rags or waste in covered metal cans.
- ◆ Clean and repair chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors and gas vents.

Prepare an Emergency Car Kit

You may not always be at home when disaster strikes. In case of a road emergency, keep a kit in the trunk of your car that includes:

- ◆ Battery-powered radio and extra batteries
- ◆ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ◆ Blanket
- ◆ Jumper cables
- ◆ Fire extinguisher (5 lb., A-B-C type)
- ◆ First aid kit and manual
- ◆ Bottled water and non-perishable, high-energy foods such as granola bars, raisins and peanut butter
- ◆ Maps
- ◆ Shovel
- ◆ Tire repair kit and pump
- ◆ Flares

Fire Safety

Keep your family safe from fire by taking steps to minimize the possibility of fire in your home and instructing family members on what to do in the event of fire. These tips will help you get started:

- ◆ Install smoke alarms throughout your home; clean and test them once a month and change batteries once a year.
- ◆ Plan two escape routes out of each room.
- ◆ Teach family members to stay low to the ground when escaping from a fire.
- ◆ Teach family members to feel doors with the palms of their hands. If a door is hot, instruct them not to open it, but to find another way out.
- ◆ Keep a whistle in each bedroom to awaken household members in case of fire.
- ◆ Check electrical outlets and make sure they are not overloaded.
- ◆ Purchase a fire extinguisher (10 lb., A-B-C type) and get training from your local fire department on how to use it.

- ♦ Have a collapsible ladder on each upper floor/room of your house.
- ♦ Consider installing home sprinklers.

For more information on protecting your family and home from fire, please refer to *A LifeCare® Digest on Fire Safety*.

Fire Escape Plan

In a fire or other emergency, you may need to leave your home at a moment's notice. In order to get out quickly and safely, develop an escape plan by drawing a floor plan of your residence.

Use a separate piece of paper for each floor. Use a black or blue pen to show the location of doors, windows, stairways and large furniture. Indicate the location of emergency supplies such as fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, collapsible ladders, first aid kits, utility shut off points and the disaster supplies kit. (The symbols below may be helpful in marking important locations.) Next, use a different colored pen to draw a broken line charting at least two escape routes from each room. Finally, mark a place outside of the home where household members should meet in case of an emergency.

Be sure to include important points outside your home such as garages, patios, stairways, elevators, driveways and porches. Practice emergency evacuation drills with all household members at least twice a year.

Did you know... ?

According to the American Red Cross, fire is the fifth leading unintentional cause of injury and death in the United States. It also ranks as the first cause of death for children under the age of 15 at home.

Mass Evacuations

If your area faces imminent danger, local officials may ask you to evacuate your home. Listen to emergency notification systems for evacuation instructions and keep the following tips in mind:

- ♦ Listen to a battery-powered radio for the location of emergency shelters.
- ♦ Follow instructions from local officials.
- ♦ Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- ♦ Take your disaster supplies kit.
- ♦ Lock your house.
- ♦ Use travel routes specified by local officials.

If you are sure you have time...

- ♦ Shut off water, gas and electricity, if instructed to do so and if you know how. *Note*—If you turn the gas off, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- ♦ Let others know when you left and where you are going.
- ♦ Make arrangements for pets.

Note—Be aware of anyone in your neighborhood who may need special help in an emergency, especially the elderly, disabled or children who may be home alone. If you are unable to help them yourself, notify disaster officials as soon as possible.

Shelters

The Red Cross may open shelters if a disaster affects a large number of people, or if the emergency is expected to last several days. These shelters provide food, temporary shelter and basic first aid. To learn about Red Cross shelters serving your area, listen to your battery-powered radio or check with your local Red Cross chapter.

Draw a floor plan of your home and use the following symbols to mark important locations:

 Normal exit route



Disaster supplies kit



Stairways

 Emergency exit route



Doors



Utility shut off



Fire extinguisher



Collapsible ladder



Windows



Smoke detectors



Meeting location (outside)



First aid kit

Going to a Shelter

You should be prepared to go to a shelter if:

- ♦ Your area is without electrical power
- ♦ There is a chemical emergency affecting your area
- ♦ Flood water is rising
- ♦ Your home has been severely damaged
- ♦ Police or other local officials tell you to evacuate

Note—All Red Cross emergency services are provided free of charge.

Did you know... ?

In 1999–2000, the American Red Cross sheltered 245,429 people who were displaced by floods, tornadoes, fires and other disasters. More than 45,000 affected families were provided with medical and financial assistance.

Shelter in Place

In a chemical emergency, you may be told to *shelter in place*. This means staying where you are and making yourself as safe as possible until the emergency passes or you are told to evacuate. In this situation, it is safer to remain indoors than to go outside where the air may be unsafe to breathe. If you are told to shelter in place:

- ♦ Close all windows in your home.
- ♦ Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems.
- ♦ Close the fireplace damper.
- ♦ Go to an above-ground room (not the basement!) with the fewest windows and doors.
- ♦ Take your disaster supplies kit with you.
- ♦ Stuff wet towels in the crack under the doors. Tape around doors, windows, exhaust fans or vents. Use plastic garbage bags to cover windows, outlets and heat registers.

- ♦ If you are told there is danger of explosion, quickly close the windows, shades, blinds or curtains, if time permits, and then stay away from the windows.
- ♦ Stay in an above-ground room and listen to your radio until you are told all is safe or you are instructed to evacuate.

Special Preparations for Seniors and People With Disabilities

If you are a senior citizen and/or have a disability, additional steps may be needed in order to prepare for an emergency. Add the following provisions to your emergency plan:

- ♦ Find out if your community offers an advance registration system. Advance registration systems are usually run by the city or town, and seniors and disabled individuals can register (usually at their local senior center, fire department or emergency management office) to have police and rescuers provide assistance in the event of an emergency.
- ♦ Arrange for someone to check on you regularly and in the event of an emergency.
- ♦ Have a plan to signal for help.
- ♦ Teach anyone who may assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment (e.g., oxygen tanks, motorized wheelchairs, etc.).
- ♦ Include special items in your disaster supplies kit, such as extra hearing aid batteries, wheelchair batteries, oxygen and Medicare cards.
- ♦ If you use home health care services, ask if they provide any emergency services/procedures.
- ♦ If you attend a senior center or adult day care center, ask what emergency plans are in place.
- ♦ Know your limitations and set up alternate emergency plans. For example, most people take shelter in a basement during a tornado, but if you are elderly and/or disabled, the basement may be inaccessible. Decide in advance what your alternative shelter will be and how you will get there.

In the event of evacuation, keep the following tips in mind:

- ♦ Coordinate with your caregiver (or other designated person) for evacuation procedures.
- ♦ Plan for transportation if you need to evacuate to a Red Cross shelter. Try to carpool if possible.
- ♦ Call the Red Cross or your local officials if you require special transportation.
- ♦ Notify shelter authorities of your special needs; they will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable.

Note—If you are caring for an elderly or disabled loved one, remember that he or she may require special care and assistance, so plan ahead, take special precautions and practice emergency procedures.

For more information on disaster preparedness, contact your local American Red Cross chapter or access their web site at <http://www.redcross.org>.

(Excerpts from *Disaster Preparedness for Seniors by Seniors* and *Emergency Preparedness Checklist* used with permission. Courtesy of the American Red Cross. All rights reserved in all countries.)

Emergency Contact Information

Fill in the information below and post copies of this form near the telephones in your home. Include a copy in your disaster supplies kit.

Out-of-State Contact

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (Day): _____ (Evening): _____

Local Contact

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (Day): _____ (Evening): _____

Nearest Relative

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (Day): _____ (Evening): _____

Family Work Numbers

Father: _____ Mother: _____

Other: _____

Emergency Telephone Numbers

Police Department: _____

Fire Department: _____

Hospital: _____

Poison Control Center: _____

Red Cross: _____

Note—In a life-threatening emergency, dial 911 or the local emergency medical services system number.

Family Physicians

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Meeting Locations

1) Right outside your home: _____

2) Away from the neighborhood, in case you cannot return home: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Route to try first: _____

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